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1898

A Vision of
St. Nicholas





A Vision of St. Nicholas

Affectionately inscribed to my friend

George Jules Denis

and the

"Placens Auctor"

33

in memory of the fair Goddess Nicolina,
in whose worship we have joined under the
hospitable umbrage of Bonnie Brae.

Holdridge Ezra Collins.

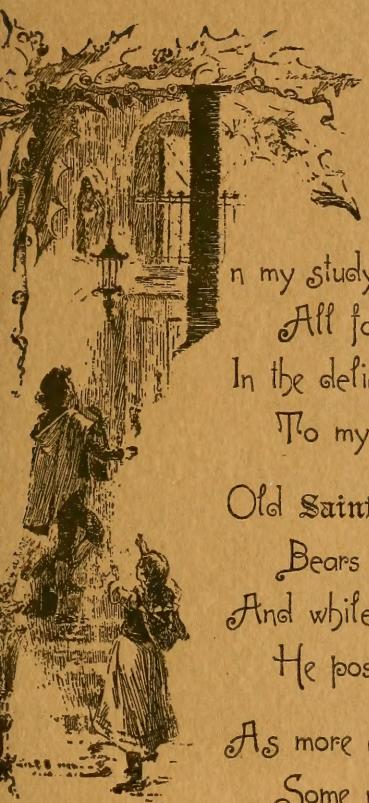
Los Angeles, California,
Xmas, 1898.

P. G. W.
the author

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A Christmas Reverie

BY

Holdridge Ozro Collins

In my study, retired from the world's busy jar,
All forgetful of Courts, and of clients' loud din,
In the delicate fumes from my fragrant cigar,
To my wonder I see a new era begin.

Old Saint Nicholas enters: his generous back
Bears a burden of snow from the fierce wintry air,
And while vainly I look for his wonderful pack,
He possesses himself of my sole easy chair.

As more closely I look at my visitor's face,
Some unusual frowns of displeasure appear.
"Sir!" I cry, "without doubt, yonder distant cold place
Is too far from the fire: be at home! Pray draw near."

With a sigh, so profound, that in trouble I start
Lest my guest may be ill,—for I well knew his worth—
From the depths of his tender and generous heart,
This reproachful complaint, 'midst his tears issued forth.

"My grateful yearly task is done.
Before the morrow's cheerful sun
Shall ope the portals of the day,
Far must I take my lonely way.
I've left some slight remembrance here,—
Will bring perchance a smile or tear:
But tears not mixed with grief or pain,—
From hearts that wish me come again.
My steeds, discharg'd their varied store,
Impatient wait me at your door.
But ere I urge them in their flight
Across the trackless wastes of night,
One plaint I make,—and make in vain,
But who their deepest sorrows can restrain?"

What my guest in dejection, so sadly had said,
Filled my soul with unutt'rable feelings of dread.
"My dear sir," I remarked, "will you please to explain
The unfortunate cause of your harrowing pain.
Grave indeed must have been mortal's cruel offense,
That can thus such a kind benefactor incense."

"Alas," he said, "for many years
I've had my constant growing fears
That all my care has been in vain,
To stretch the limit of my reign.
When e'er upon this annual eve
The portals of my home I leave,
Beneath my seat the yearly hoard
Of curious treasures safely stored,
One solace of my flight I miss,-
My joy and comfort. See, 'tis this."

On his small meerschaum Pipe there displayed to my view,
An inquisitive glance, in my wonder, I threw.
At the sight, in amazement, "Good heavens!" I shout,
"Why, dear sir, your most venerable Pipe has gone out."
In confusion I stood, and unable to guess
What the omen might mean; and unwilling to press
My companion its import concealed to explain,
Lest perchance I'd offend, when he thus spake again:

"The winter's blasts of snow and hail
With wrath report the mournful tale,
'Your Pipe is out.' Alas! 'tis true.
That ancient bowl from which I drew
Sweet incense to the Goddess' shrine
Who guards the fragrant Nicotine,
My badge of power, known far and wide,
Where e'er my nimble Reindeers glide,
Has lost its charm; and noisy Flame,
With boist'rous shouts, I hear proclaim
The praises of a rising star,
I think you call its name—Cigar."

"Most benevolent sir, now the subject you mention,-
The ecstatic cigar,- I sincerely rejoice
For this chance to invite your most kindly attention
To my wants. For next Christmas a gen'rous invoice
Of Cheroots, this delightful and modern invention,
Is my earnest request and unalt'rable choice.
You'll be angry, I fear, but it's not overstated,
When I say your old Pipe has become antiquated.
The new God, the Cigar, its old realm has invaded,
And his power firm established, he reigns unmolested.

"But here, most ancient sir, to lay aside
All metaphor, I'm willing to abide
Your own opinion candidly expressed,
First giving this cigar an honest test.

"And besides, *entre nous*, when you don't have to buy it,
I remark that its virtue is greater: Here,-try it."
In one hand I extended a box to his sight
Of Antiguedad firsts, in the other a light.

With slow and hesitating hand
He chooses, and assays the brand.
I see his twinkling eyes confess
The fragrant argument's success.
His fears forsake his troubled soul,
Breathes on the clouds that round him roll.
"I see my error now," he said,
"I've been a grumbler, and instead
Of watching innovation's pace,
To guard my laurels in the race,
Your modern enterprise I find
Has left me struggling far behind.
This truth no longer now concealed,
In yonder cloud I see revealed:
To all who yearly wait me here,
I'm still as welcome and as dear;
But yet, all efforts were in vain,
My wonted empire to retain,
Unless with zealous care I sought
Appropriate gifts for modern thought.



'My Pipe is out'! You say aright,
But from its ashes springs a light
That indicates the certain way
By which I can confirm my sway.
Old foggy notions here I'll throw aside,
And haste to overtake th' advancing stride
Of Progress. But, good night! I hear
Th' impatient pawing of my Deer.
'Tis many leagues of flight before
They'll see their distant stable's door.
Their breakfast waits them, and I fear
To keep them longer fretting here.
I'm off; but first I'll take a mem.
Concerning you next year.--Ahem!
I beg your pardon,--but I would suggest,
My journey will be long before I rest,--
Excuse me,--but the distance is so far,
I'll beg th' indulgence of a fresh cigar."

"Help yourself my old friend, there are plenty to spare,
It were shameful besides to refuse you a share."
I replenished his pouch with the solacing weeds,
While he loosened the reins of his beautiful steeds.
With a shout he was off, and a clatter and jingle,
Brought an end to my visit with jolly Kris Kringle.



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